

1 Neighborhood Context



Neighborhood Structure
Street Character Framework
Transportation Assessment
Community Identity

The Columbia Heights Neighborhood

Columbia Heights is changing rapidly as it attracts new housing, significant retail development and an influx of new residents.

The primary commercial corridor of the neighborhood, 14th Street NW, was significantly damaged in the 1968 riots following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Re-investment in the neighborhood core over the following thirty years has been minimal.

In 1997, residents and stakeholders in Columbia Heights participated in a community charrette to create a redevelopment strategy for the neighborhood. Since the charrette, the neighborhood has been the focus of a major neighborhood redevelopment effort by the government of the District of Columbia and other public development entities, including the National Capital Revitalization Corporation (NCRC), the RLA Revitalization Corporation (RLA) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

In 1999, WMATA opened the Columbia Heights Metro Station. This has helped connect the area to the rest of the region through the Green Line rail service and has increased the livability of the neighborhood.

This chapter provides a summary assessment of the neighborhood and is divided into three sections: *Neighborhood Structure*, *Street Character Framework*, and *Community Identity*.

- The *Neighborhood Structure* section provides an overview of the study area.
- The *Street Character Framework* identifies the hierarchy of streets in the neighborhood and provides a summary of the Transportation Plan
- The *Community Identity* section summarizes the public workshops held to understand residents' concerns and desires for the public realm and redevelopment in the neighborhood.



Neighborhood Art



Redevelopment Site along 14th Street



Infill Development on Park Road



14th Street Commercial Corridor, 1940s
Source: 1997 Community-Based Plan, WAF



14th Street, NW, April 1968
Source: 1997 Community-Based Plan, WAF



West side of 14th Street NW, 2003



The Green Line Metro Station



Neighborhood Gateway at 16th Street

A Community Based Plan for the Columbia Heights Metro Station Area, 1997



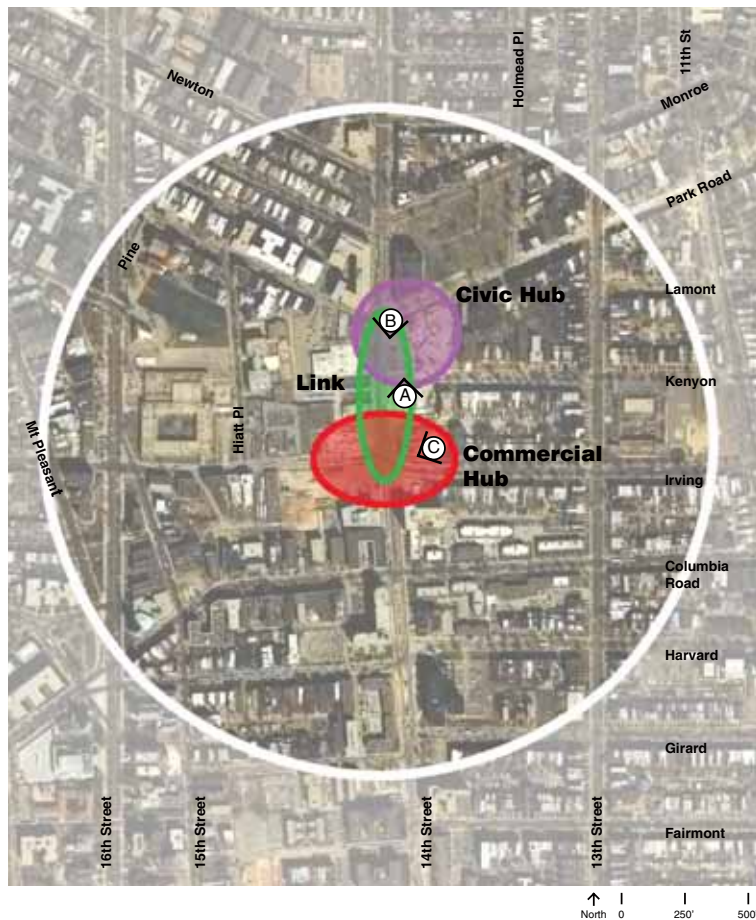
(A) The Civic Hub
Looking toward the Civic Hub Site from the
south along 14th St.



(B) The Link
14th St. looking south from the Civic Hub Site



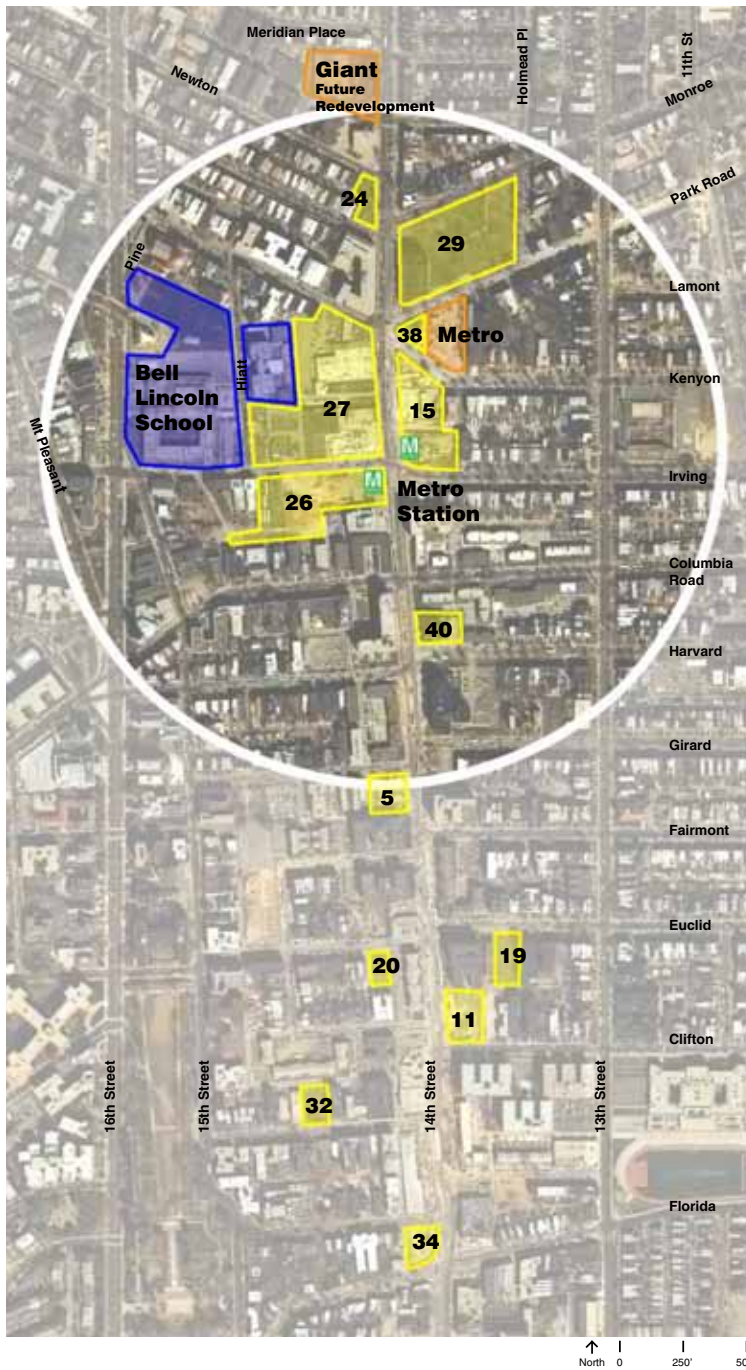
(C) The Commercial Hub
The west side of 14th St. and Irving St.
Intersection



The Public Realm Framework recommendations build on the Core Concept Diagram (above) and the principles identified in *A Community-Based Plan for the Columbia Heights Metro Station Area*, completed in 1997. The principles in bold italics are specifically addressed in the Framework's recommendations.

The Underlying Principles of the 1997 Plan

1. ***Development should serve residents first, then tourists and other visitors.***
2. Community-oriented retail stores and services should be given priority.
3. ***Land use and location decisions should be designed to create a lively, well-shaded streetscape, both day and night.***
4. Operating hours of shops, movie theaters and restaurants should be coordinated, and the location and hours of vendors managed to allow this to happen.
5. ***Facades of new structures should be aligned at the sidewalk edge, not farther back.***
6. ***Parking should be underground or hidden behind retail structures.***
7. ***Ground level properties facing 14th Street should be retail, restaurants or other lively walk-in uses.***
8. ***Large retail establishments should have a minimum street frontage. No blank facades allowed.***
9. ***There should be some form of plaza or green space.***
10. ***New structures should be architecturally compatible with older ones; their scales should blend. Existing zoning heights and densities should be maintained.***
11. ***Vehicular traffic flow should be improved.***
12. ***The Tivoli Theater should be restored and/or adapted for re-use.***
13. ***The international ambiance of the neighborhood should be developed as a citywide draw.***
14. Demolition of existing structures should be controlled.
15. Rehabilitating existing housing should take precedence over new construction.
16. A one-stop community services center should be developed along with a police substation and a new post office.
17. Innovative ways of dealing with crime and personal security problems are needed.
18. ***There should be two focal points along 14th Street; a civic & cultural heart in the Tivoli Area, and a commercial heart at the Metro Station.***
19. Consideration should be given to upgrading and enhancing the existing educational institutions so they can meet the needs of the entire community.



Redevelopment Activity

(RLARC Development Parcels identified in yellow)

There are approximately fourteen acres in various stages of development within walking distance of the Columbia Heights Metro station. The projected development includes over 600 new housing units, approximately 650,000 square feet of retail space, 30,000 square feet of office space, approximately 2000 parking spaces and a new 800 student public middle and high school.

Parcel Number	Project
• Parcel 24	Dance Institute
• Parcel 29	Tivoli Partners
• Parcel 27	DC USA
• Parcel 38	Civic Plaza Site
• Metro	Triangle, II
• Parcels 15 & 26	Columbia Heights Ventures
• Parcel 40	Urban League
• Parcel 5	NPCDC
• Parcel 19 & 32	Triangle, II
• Parcel 11	Duron, Inc.
• Parcel 20 & 34	In Progress

Existing Zoning

The existing zoning and land uses in the neighborhood support the development of 14th Street as the commercial core surrounded by residential development.

- GOV Major Federal Tracts
- Streets
- PUDs
- Area of Overlay Districts
- Water
- Buildings

- | Zoning | Description |
|--------|---|
| C-1 | Neighborhood Shopping |
| C-2A | Community business center low to medium density |
| C-2B | Community business center medium density |
| C-2C | Community business center high density |
| C-3A | Medium to high business and employment |
| C-3B | Medium to high business and employment |
| C-3C | High to high business and employment |
| C-4 | Central business district |
| C-5 | Public Transportation Business Development |
| C-6A | Low to medium commercial and light manufacturing |
| C-6B | Medium to high commercial and light manufacturing |
| C-6C | High to high commercial and light manufacturing |
| C-6D | Medium to high commercial and light manufacturing |
| C-6E | High to high commercial and light manufacturing |
| C-6F | High to high commercial and light manufacturing |
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Prepared By The District of Columbia Office of Zoning



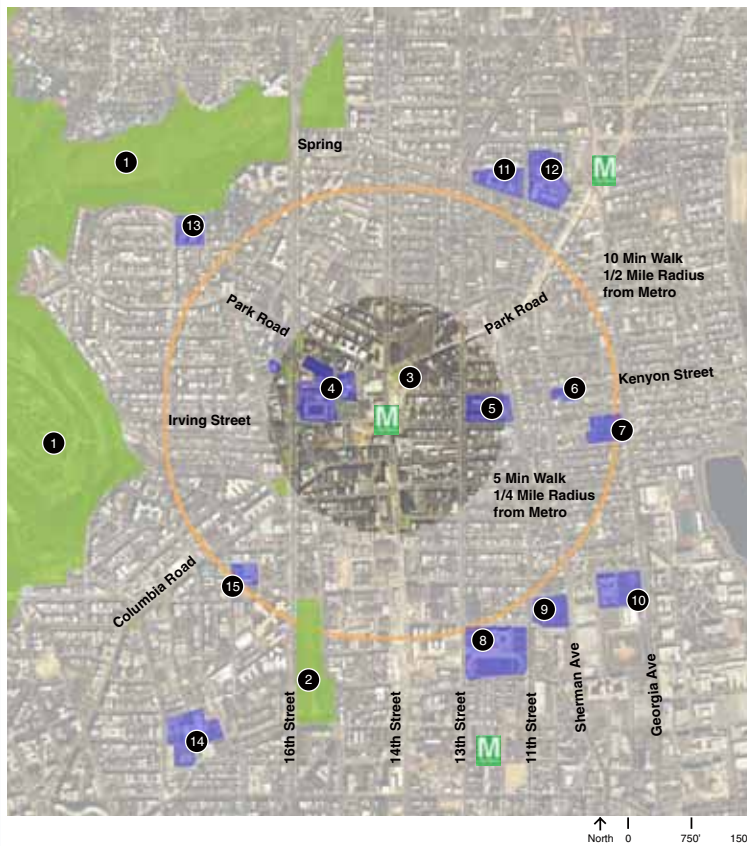
Existing and Proposed Land Uses

- Residential
- Mixed-Use (P=Proposed)
- Commercial
- Institutional



Neighborhood Public Open Space, Schools and Libraries

The neighborhood includes numerous schools within close proximity to the Metro station and a wealth of civic institutions that reflect the diversity of the community.



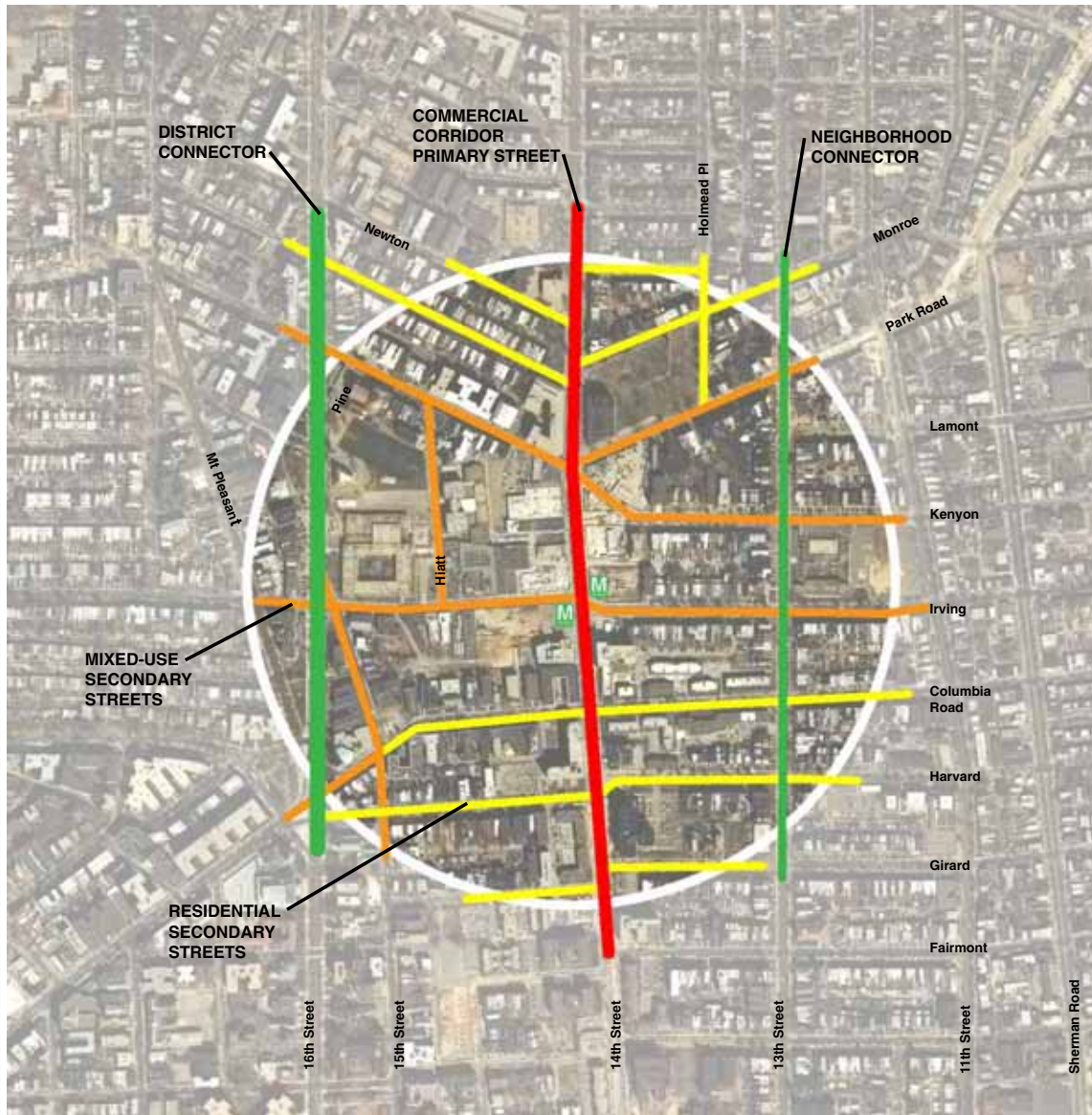
- 1 Rock Creek Park
- 2 Meridian Hill Park
- 3 Future Civic Plaza
- 4 Bell Multicultural SHS / Lincoln Middle School
- 5 Tubman Elementary School
- 6 Bruce School
- 7 Bruce-Monroe Elementary School
- 8 Cardozo Senior High School
- 9 Meyer Elementary School
- 10 Banneker Senior High School
- 11 Paul Robeson Special Education School
- 12 Raymond Elementary School
- 13 Bancroft Elementary School
- 14 Marie Reed Learning Center
- 15 H.D. Cooke Elementary School
- 16 Mt. Pleasant Library



Community Assets

- 1 National Baptist Church
- 2 Calvary - Casa del Pueblo United Methodist Church, Rorschach Theater
Central American Resource Center
- 3 The Next Step Public Charter School
Latin American Youth Center
- 4 Calvary Multicultural Center
- 5 All Souls Unitarian Church
- 6 La Clinica del Pueblo
- 7 Second Genesis - Help for Addiction
- 8 Capitol City Public Charter School (above CVS)
- 9 Church of Christ
- 10 Harriet Tubman Elementary School
- 11 Easter Seal Society - Child Development Center
- 12 Village II Early Childhood Development Center
- 13 True Family Education Center of D.C.
- 14 DC Department of Parks & Recreation Headquarters
- 15 Mount Pleasant Public Library
- 16 Meridian Hill Baptist Church
- 17 Neighbor's Consejo Community Center
- 18 Barbara Chambers Children's Center
- 19 La Casa
- 20 Bell Multicultural High School
- 21 Shrine of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church
- 22 Elsie Whitlow Stokes Community Freedom Public Charter School
- 23 Sacred Heart School
- 24 Canaan Baptist Church
- 25 Spanish Catholic Center
- 26 The Family Place
- 27 Catholic Charities McKenna House
- 28 Kelsey Temple Church of God in Christ
- 29 Mt Rona Baptist Church
- 30 Lincoln School
- 31 DC Fire Department
- 32 Development Corporation of Columbia Heights, DCCH
- 33 The Greater Washington Urban League (future site)
- 34 Tivoli Theater
- 35 St Stephens

Street Character Framework



North 0 250' 500'

Different types and intensities of land use have different urban design requirements. The Street Character Framework illustrates the classification and hierarchy of the public street system in the neighborhood and ensures that streets with different use and transportation functions are appropriately linked and guides the development of pedestrian amenities.

The Appendix also includes an assessment of the physical characteristics of each street within 1/4 mile of the Metro station in order to provide a basis for guiding future improvements. Summary findings from the concurrent Transportation Plan for each street are also included.

Transportation Plan Summary Assessment of Existing Conditions

Source: Cambridge Systematics



**Congestion
& Level of Service
- A.M. Peak**



**Congestion
& Level of Service
- P.M. Peak**



**Congestion
& Level of Service
- Weekend Mid-Day**

○ Intersection
— A, B, & C
— D
— E
— F



**Automobile Crashes
1999 - 2001**

• 1 - 4
• 5 - 14
• 15 - 24
• 25 - 34
• 35 - 45



**Pedestrian Counts
24 Hour**

• 401 - 1,500
• 1,501 - 2,250
• 2,251 - 3,000
• 3,001 - 3,500



**Pedestrian Crashes
and Potential Safety
Issue Areas
1997 - 2001**

• 1 - 2
• 3 - 4
• 5 - 6
• 7 - 10
• 11
Area of Concern

The diagrams above summarize the Transportation Plan's assessment of existing conditions. Key findings which have informed the development of the Public Realm Framework include:

- Intersections along 16th Street and the north end of 14th Street in the study area have the most congestion and lowest level of service. 14th Street in the core area currently provides an acceptable level of service
- The intersections with the highest number of automobile crashes are: 16th Street / Park Road, 16th Street / Irving Street, 14th Street / Park Road / Kenyon Street, and 13th Street / Columbia Road
- The intersection of 14th Street / Park Road / Kenyon has the highest pedestrian volume in the neighborhood followed by 14th Street / Irving St, 16th Street / Irving Street, and 14th Street / Columbia Road
- The highest number of pedestrian crashes occurs at the intersection of 16th Street / Irving Street. There are two potential safety issue areas: 16th Street between Harvard Street and Park Road, and 14th Street between Irving Street and Park Road.

Community Identity

A public realm which strengthens the identity of the Columbia Heights neighborhood is essential. To build upon the qualities of the existing neighborhood, a series of meetings with the Advisory Committee and a public workshop were held to provide opportunities for resident input.

The public workshop had two purposes. Maps and icon cards were used to hear from residents about their concerns and desires for physical improvements to the public realm: in particular, the 14th Street Corridor, the Civic Plaza and the adjacent streets. The workshop was also used to capture residents' impressions of the qualities and characteristics of Columbia Heights to help serve as a foundation for future improvements to the public realm.

Icon Cards - An Initial Menu



These icon cards, in addition to blank cards, were used by the community to identify concerns and opportunities for development of the public realm. Community members place cards on large maps to identify where these concerns and opportunities exist.

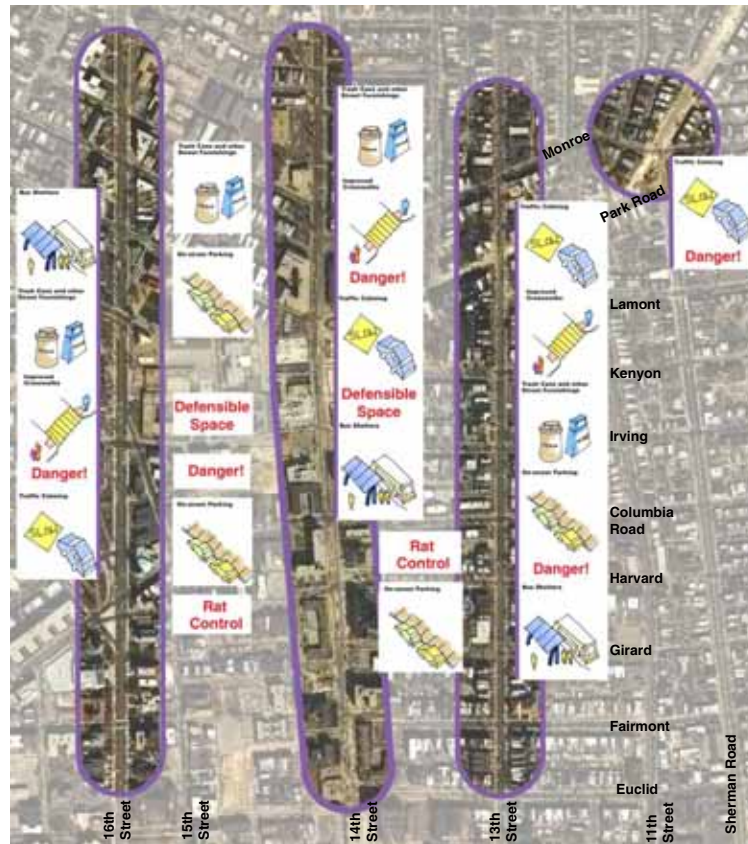
The Public Workshop



Neighborhood Issues

Summary:

- The north-south streets - 16th, 14th and 13th streets - need improved intersections and traffic calming.
- Street furnishings, such as trash cans and bus shelters are needed at select locations along the north-south streets.
- On-street parking on the Park Road and Columbia causes problems with through traffic.
- East-west streets with high pedestrian volumes need to have trash cans and better lighting for personal safety.



Neighborhood Gateways

Summary:

- Neighborhood residents identified western gateways along 16th Street, north and south gateways along 14th Street and eastern gateways at 13th Street and Sherman Road.
- The Green Line Metro entrance is also identified as a gateway.





Potential Enhancements along 14th Street NW

Summary:

- Several intersections along 14th were identified as potential locations for community enhancements, including: the triangular park at Oak Street, the existing Giant parking lot and the park at Girard.
- The intersections at Irving St, Columbia Road and Park Road should be identifiable as special intersections in the neighborhood.
- The Metro plazas should be enhanced with better bus facilities, public art and adjacent development which supports transit ridership.



Potential Elements in the Civic Plaza

Summary:

- Residents suggested that the civic plaza should be designed to accommodate opportunities for people watching, musical performances and special events, such as the farmers market. The design of the plaza should also reflect the diversity of the neighborhood with public art, unique signage and adjacent uses which enrich the plaza.

Note: The numbers in red identify the frequency selected for each element by the residents.

Neighborhood Recreation Opportunities

Summary:

- Residents suggested that enhancements to existing parks and school grounds should provide recreational opportunities in the neighborhood.



Desired Landscape Enhancements

Summary:

- Residents identified the desire for enhanced landscaping at the existing parks in the neighborhoods.
- Residents also identified the desire for additional street trees along the main east-west pedestrian streets in the neighborhood.



Defining Community Identity

The primary strategy of this plan has been to capture the essential and evolving character of Columbia Heights and to identify a 'design character' for the public realm.

The community identified the following neighborhood characteristics:

- a commitment to embrace the extraordinary cultural and economic diversity
- a sense of enthusiasm and vitality for the public realm
- a spirit of openness and tolerance
- an interest in promoting development which respects its past while looking forward to the future.

The residents also identified the following attributes:

- Multi-ethnic / multi-cultural district
- A neighborhood with historic qualities
- Quality residential fabric
- Commercial crossroads
- 'Sub-district' cultural/arts center
- Place of evolving / dynamic cultural / physical change
- Active neighborhood public involvement
- Public education cores: Bell, Lincoln, Cardozo
- Mass-transit-station hub / transit-oriented development
- Hilltop prominence / views to monumental core.

Community Identity

The community was also asked for words which describe the atmosphere of Columbia Heights. Their words have been organized into the categories shown below.

1. Cultural

multi-cultural
humanity
multi-generational
'kaleido-cultural'

multi-economic
community oriented
mix of faces
neighborhood

melting-pot
multi-ethnic
familiar faces
multi-lingual

2. Ambience / Atmospheric

Viva!
sense of conflict
urban
uncut/raw
chaos

'a lot going on'
unrefined
crowds
vitality
'spike lee joint'

crossroads
vibrancy
edgy-tension
density
skyline

3. Social

open
colors
accommodating
flexible
contrasts
multi-generational

tolerance
multi-purpose/use
old/new
accepting
non-linear

'kaleidoscope'
welcoming
shapes
diverse
rooftops

4. Temporal / Changing

changing
emerging

evolving
revival

history/ic
'renaissance'

5. Humanitarian

soulful
we/the people as 'art'

personal
people focused (not object)

intimate



